

Together
One People in One Place

Pentecost, May 31st, 2020
A Sermon for Four Voices
by Matt Matthews

Matt.

Here in Acts we get a snapshot of the first church. The eleven remaining disciples have convened. The faithful women have also come. Jesus' brothers are there. No mention is made of their families, but it is possible that a wife of one of the disciples, or a son, are also among that number. So, the congregation is probably 17 strong—maybe twenty, or twenty five.

What can we learn from them about the church?

.Judi.

First, we know the earliest members of the early church were patient. They had to be. Jesus, risen from the dead, has ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait. Waiting is difficult.

Will Willimon says that waiting is an “onerous burden for us computerized and [technologically] impatient moderns who live in an age of instant everything. Our waiting implies that the things which need doing are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort, our programs and crusades. Some other empowerment is needed, therefore the church waits and prays.” (p520, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol 2).

That empowerment, Jesus says, is coming in the form of the Holy Spirit.

.Mindy.

We know that this early church has questions. They wonder if Jesus is about to restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus says two things by way of reply.

First, there are things that are not for us to know. In other words, live faithfully in the present; don't be overly concerned about things that are in God's hands. We don't know the future, and there is grace in not knowing. The Psalmist

didn't say, "This is the century the Lord has made" (though it is), but, rather, "This is the *day* the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Stay grounded in the now. Live today well.

Jesus also implies that these disciples are thinking too small. They ask about the Kingdom of Israel, but what Jesus has been talking about all along is not just the Kingdom of Israel but the Kingdom of God. A major emphasis in the book of Acts is how God is reaching for the whole world, both Jews *and* everybody else. Yes, God cares about Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. He says so. But God also cares for the *ends of the world*.

Jesus invites both the ancient church and the modern church to think bigger. God cares for the whole global family.

.Rachel.

And who is supposed to spread this good news? Jesus lays that responsibility on that congregation of 17 to 25 souls. *You* are to be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world.

You.

The text says that Jesus, after saying these things, is lifted up into heaven. Angels come with a message of encouragement. Jesus will come again. Relax. *In the meantime . . .*

.Matt.

In the meantime . . . We learn much about discipleship when we pay attention to what happened next: *they stayed together*.

.Rachel.

They were all together in ONE PLACE.

.All Readers.

They were ALL together in ONE place.

.Judi.

Just like *we* are together now.

.Mindy.

You mean the early church was together on Facebook Live and You Tube?

.Judi.

No. I mean they were together, of one accord, united. *Just like we are.* I don't like the fact that the Coronavirus has required us to be physically distant. I miss hugs. Nor, do I like that the Coronavirus has closed down the beautiful sanctuary from face-to-face, in person worship.

But that hasn't stopped us from gathering.

.Rachel.

I meet with people every day on Zoom. We have Mission-related meetings. We study together. We pray together. *The church is alive.*

.Judi.

People are healthier when they are part of a wider community. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote from the Birmingham jail that, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." He was saying that when anybody faces injustice, we all face injustice. And, like it or not, we are one people.

.Mindy.

I like being part of one really big family.

In Acts we read about how central the community of faith is. The community shares resources for the common good. They break bread together. They take care of each other. They gather weekly for worship. They understood this idea of being part of the same garment, the same body, the heartbeat of the same God.

This early church on the first day did an amazing and central thing: *they stayed together.*

.All.

They stayed together, all together, in ONE place.

.Matt.

The scripture tells us something else they did, no less amazing. They prayed.

Denzel Washington once gave advice to young actors gathered around him on stage. He used an expression I had never heard before. He said, *At night when you go to bed, I hope you put your shoes way under your bed.* This caused the crowd to erupt in cheers; they knew what he meant by that phrase. When your shoes are way under your bed, in the morning you have to get on your hands and knees to get them.

Ah! While you're down there, Washington said, pray.

.Rachel.

The early church didn't need to be reminded to put their shoes way under their bed. The scripture says they were "constantly devoted" to prayer. While they waited, there was nothing left for them to do.

.Matt.

What do we learn from the early church about being a disciple of Jesus?

.Judi.

(1) They were patient.

.Mindy.

(2) They trusted Jesus' promise that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

.Rachel.

(3) They had questions; questions are okay.

.Mindy.

(4) They were called to be witnesses—both nearby and around the world.

.Judi.

(5) They valued community by staying together.

.Rachel.

(6) They prayed together.

And the church grew.

.Matt.

Ginny Barksdale a hero of the faith to me says that ministry is “relationship, relationship, relationship.” And from that tiny gathering of early Christians, relationships flourished. Everywhere.

.Mindy.

They dug wells. They delivered groceries to families in need. They prayed for one another. They contributed to church budgets. They marched in the streets. They knitted prayer shawls together, and hats, and mittens.

.Rachel.

They taught and studied together. They encouraged one another. They visited the elderly. They sang praises to God. They tackled poverty together. They stood up for those without a voice. They worshiped together in houses and synagogues, in churches and in catacombs. They prayed.

.Judi.

They listened. They followed. They tried. Sometimes they succeeded. Sometimes they failed. They died. They danced. They finger painted with five-year-olds. They shared recipes with people of other cultures. They raised children. They learned each other’s language. They worked quietly behind the scenes. They were executed in the public squares. T

.Mindy.

They helped neighborhood kids with their homework. They worked hard to disrupt the school to prison pipeline by founding agencies like DREAM House. They founded SAFE House. They started ESL programs.

.Judi.

They worked jobs for too little pay. They shunned ostentation. They put Jesus at the center of their lives.

.All.

*They put Jesus
at the center
of their lives.*

.Rachel.

They were blinded on the road to Damascus. Their sons and daughters will proclaimed God's message; their young men saw visions; their old men dreamed dreams. They laid hands on the hurting. They reached out to the faraway.

.Matt.

As we read the rest of the book of Acts we see that this small congregation, empowered by the Holy Spirit, quickly became **Great Commission People**: they become witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, making disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them everything Jesus commanded.

.Rachel.

This rag tag group of Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit, quickly became **Great Commandment People**: loving the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; and loving their neighbor as they loved themselves.

.Judi.

By the power of the God's Holy Spirit we stand with those people.

.Mindy.

By the power of the God's Holy Spirit we *are* those people.

.Rachel.

By the power of God's Holy Spirit we are standing together now, right now, *all together*,

.All.

In ONE place.

AMEN. AMEN. AMEN.

Matt: Join us in the Affirmation of faith. You'll be seeing a slide.
Do you trust in the Holy Spirit?

Judi/Mindy/Rachel/Matt:

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,**

**sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

**The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

**In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Acts 2:1-21 **1**When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2**And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3**Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"